

SQUIBB ACADEMIC LECTURE:

ATTITUDES TOWARDS MENTAL ILLNESS IN ANTIQUITY

R. D. MILNS*

I should like to commence this lecture by saying how I have defined two of the words in the title. By 'antiquity' I mean specifically the ancient civilisations of Greece and Rome, and I make this limitation, not because I wish to downgrade the undoubted achievements of other ancient civilisations, such as those of Egypt and Mesopotamia, but because the original, primary source material is accessible to me only when written in Greek or Latin, and I believe, as a matter of principle, that understanding of the thoughts and beliefs of an alien culture comes only through a knowledge of that culture's language. Second, I have taken the term 'attitudes' in a broad sense to cover such aspects as popular beliefs, professional theorising and the ways in which society viewed its own, and the individual's, responsibilities in matters concerning mental illness. These are the three main areas into which I have subdivided this lecture.

Popular Attitudes to Mental Illness

By 'popular' I mean attitudes to mental illness as seen in writers other than the philosophers and medical writers. 'Popular' can cover a wide range of social strata and beliefs, and we must remember that the writers of antiquity were almost invariably from the upper class, better educated and likely to be more 'enlightened' in their views than most of the population. Hence their attitudes may not be typical of those of the majority. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume that attitudes displayed in the works of the dramatic writers, writing for the great public presentations, and in the reporting of common superstitions by our upper class writers, do reflect general beliefs and attitudes.

First, let us look briefly at the works of the great Athenian tragedians, for tragedy contains some of the most vivid descriptions of insanity in ancient literature; indeed, so vivid that the writers must have made personal observations of the behaviour of madmen and madwomen. Among the great insane of tragedy are: Orestes, in both Aeschylus' *Eumenides* and Euripides' *Orestes*; Ajax in Sophocles' play of that name; Heracles in the Euripidean play; and, perhaps the most famous example of collective madness, the *Bacchae* of Euripides. Orestes' behaviour in Euripides would probably be diagnosed as that of the schizophrenic, with his terrifying visions, his wild ravings interspersed with periods of sleep, his fits of despair, refusal of food and drink and repeated wishing for death. The deeply brooding Ajax, whose resentment and shame drive him to suicide, fits well the manic-depressive type. Indeed, among later Greek writers, Ajax was regarded as the typical example of the 'melancholic' man, whose characteristics closely resemble the manic-depressive illness. The appalling scene in the *Heracles*, in which the hero suddenly becomes a violent madman, murders his wife and small children in his father's palace under the delusion that they are his enemies, and finally sinks into an exhausted sleep, resembles the form of epilepsy which, I understand, is known as an 'epileptic equivalent'. It is interesting that later writers in antiquity, perhaps influenced by Euripides' portrayal, regarded Heracles as an epileptic, with some asserting that epilepsy itself was named 'the Sacred Disease' after the hero, who subsequently became a god.¹

A different kind of madness is that which afflicts Agave and her women companions in the *Bacchae*. This is the collective madness born of religious ecstasy and drives the women, as they

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range over the mountain, to tear Agave's son, Pentheus, to pieces with their bare hands in the belief that he is a lion that they have caught. Towards the end of the play, Agave, still holding her son's bloody head, is brought back to sanity by her old father. The scene, in which Agave is gradually made to acknowledge her monstrous act and to realise that she must learn to live with it, has been made the subject of a perceptive article by the French psychiatrist Dr G. Devereux.² Devereux concludes that 'Euripides observed and described accurately, and probably understood intuitively, not only psychological illness but also the psychotherapeutic process', and 'The psychotherapeutic scene of the *Bacchae* is clinically flawless and persuasive; it will bear comparison with any modern summary of a psychotherapy written by a professional clinician.'

The common theme in these examples of tragic madness is that they are all caused by a god or gods, usually as a punishment for wicked or impious actions. Thus Orestes is hounded by the Furies (Eumenides) for the murder of his mother, even though in doing so he was carrying out his obligation to avenge his father's murder. Ajax has been made mad by Athena, the protectress especially of Odysseus, both to prevent his intended attack on Odysseus and to punish him for it. Pentheus was torn apart by the Bacchantes to punish him for trying to prevent the worship of Dionysus: the god used the women as his instrument by making them kill Pentheus in their frenzy. Heracles falls outside this pattern of punishment for wrong-doing. His madness is inflicted upon him by Lyssa, the personification of insanity, on the orders of Hera, who never ceased to pursue the hero because of her jealousy of his being born to a mortal woman by her husband, Zeus.

The theme of madness as a divine punishment for wicked deeds can also be seen in the work of the contemporary of the tragedians, the historian Herodotus. Among the great and mad figures of sixth and fifth century BC history who appear in Herodotus' narrative is the overbearing, brutal Spartan King Cleomenes. After being recalled to Sparta, for suspected subversive activities, Cleomenes went mad, having, according to the historians, been somewhat unstable even before this. He adopted the practice of hitting in the face with his staff any Spartan citizen he encountered. He was put in wooden stocks by his relatives and there committed suicide in a particularly revolting manner: 'As he was lying there,' says Herodotus, 'fast bound, he noticed that all his guards had left him except one. He asked this man, who was a

serf, to give him a knife. At first the fellow refused, but Cleomenes, by threats of what he would do to him when he recovered his liberty, so frightened him that at last he consented. As soon as the knife was in his hands, Cleomenes began to mutilate himself, beginning on his shins. He sliced his flesh into strips, working upwards to his thighs, and from them to his hips and sides, until he reached his belly, which he chopped into mincemeat. This finished him.'³ After his death, the cause of his madness was put down by different Greek states to divine punishment for the particular acts of sacrilege performed against each of them while he was king: the Athenians, because he had invaded Eleusis and ravaged the shrine of Demeter and Persephone; the people of Argos, because of a gruesome act of sacrilege at one of their temples; and 'the majority of the Greeks', because he had corrupted the Priestess of Apollo at Delphi to lie about the legitimacy of his rival, King Demaratus, which had resulted in Demaratus being driven from his throne. This is the view that Herodotus himself supports. The normally superstitious Spartans themselves, however, took a more mundane view: 'heaven had no hand in Cleomenes' madness and his evil end, but by consorting with Scythians he became a drinker of strong wine and thence the madness came'.⁴

We do not know whether these different causes alleged by different states were 'official' and publicly proclaimed as evidence of divine justice. But I think that the testimony of Herodotus and the tragedians may be taken as showing that it was common belief among the Greeks that madness, especially among the great and powerful, could be sent by the gods as a punishment for impious and sacrilegious behaviour, and even, as with the case of Heracles, as an act of indirect vengeance.

The other popular form of Athenian drama was comedy; and the plays of Aristophanes contain many references to madness. A passage from his play *The Wasps* is particularly interesting for our subject, because, although it does not show any particular attitude to mental illness itself, it gives a long list of the different approaches to the *treatment* of insanity, which are far different from the approach found in the medical writers.⁵ The father, Philocleon, is obsessed to madness with jury service in the People's Courts and has to be restrained by his son. One of his slaves set to guard the old man relates the methods used by the son to try to cure him of his madness: persuasion, with soothing words; then washing and purification; next incubation in the temple of Asclepius in Aegina; after this, taking father to participate in Corybantic rites; and finally, since

all else had failed, constraint by locking him up (and draping the house with nets to stop him escaping through the drains and chimneys). Of these forms of attempted cure, purification (Greek *katharmos*) by washing or other cleansing acts was believed to be a method of freeing a person or a community from a religious pollution (*miasma*) and is one of the magical treatments for illness, including madness and epilepsy, whose practitioners are scornfully dismissed as charlatans by the author of the Hippocratic treatise on *The Sacred Disease*.⁶ Insanity, therefore, was regarded in popular thought as being caused by a religious pollution, which may often be unintentional.⁷ Incubation involved sleeping in the temple of a god, especially Asclepius, in the hope of obtaining a miraculous cure from the healing god, and is also frequently mentioned as a cure for madness.⁸ The Corybantes were the priests of Cybele, the orgiastic Phrygian deity, whose rites were celebrated with dancing and wild music played on the flute and the kettledrum.⁹ The patients participated in the music and dancing, which often produced violent and emotional physical symptoms, and were cured, according to Plato, of 'phobias and anxiety-feelings arising from some marked mental condition'.¹⁰ Dodds describes the Corybantic ritual as a form of 'magico-religious catharsis' and refers to the strong belief throughout antiquity that music had a therapeutic function in the treatment of mental illness — though I might add that there was also the opinion among physicians that mental patients should be kept away from music, especially of the flute, as this had the effect of exciting them. Dodds argues — correctly, I believe — in the context of his discussion of Corybantism, that 'the old magico-religious catharsis [i.e., purification] was eventually detached from its religious context and applied in the field of lay psychiatry, to supplement the purely physical treatment which the Hippocratic doctors had used'. Parker also may be correct when he argues that Hippocratic medicine, so praised for its rationality, is in many respects an unconscious continuation of age-old magic and religious practices and beliefs.¹¹ This is particularly so in the importance shown in the Hippocratic Corpus to purging the body. Among the most common forms of drug treatment for madness in the Corpus is purging by the use of hellebore, and Theophrastus¹² indicates that hellebore was used by people 'to purify their houses and their flocks, chanting some kind of charm over it, and for a great number of other jobs'. In other words, the general 'magico-

religious' *katharma* or purification has become the main medical means of cleansing the body of its harmful qualities, such as phlegm and bile. Temkin, moreover, points out that Dioscorides, the most famous of the pharmacological writers of antiquity, in his *Materia Medica* lists 45 pharmacological remedies for epilepsy, of which at least 17 have a magical, superstitious connotation (including black hellebore). Temkin argues further that the dietetic regimen favoured by the physicians for the treatment of disease generally — including mental disease — rather than the use of drugs, was a luxury that only the upper classes could afford. 'Poor people had to be treated differently. They had to stake their hope on a drug that promised a quick cure or a sure remedy — perhaps even an incantation — recommended to them by a friend or a quack.'¹³ Yet it should be pointed out that in Aristophanes' *Wasps*, the insane Philocleon is not a poor man (he owns a house and slaves), and the one thing missing from the list of treatments applied to his madness is the calling in of a doctor. Perhaps the old superstitious ways remained common even in the more prosperous levels of Athenian society. We may note that while there is no hint that Philocleon's obsessive madness is caused by a vengeful deity, nor does any of the treatments applied entail the appeasement of a punishing god, nevertheless the popular belief was that insanity could be cured by supernatural means.

Our examination of some of the works of Greek literature of the fifth century BC — the so-called 'Classical Age' — has shown us the belief that the great and powerful, at least, could be stricken by the gods as a punishment for great and terrible crimes. A papyrus fragment of what seems to be Aristophanes' lost play *Heroes* shows us that at the level of 'the common man' also it was believed that madness could be a punishment inflicted by higher powers for human transgression. The chorus of heroes — human beings accorded semi-divine status after their death — proclaims that they send on wrongdoers all manner of diseases, such as spleen, dropsy and madness.¹⁴ But there is also ample evidence that testifies to a widespread popular belief that people could be inflicted with madness by supernatural agencies purely out of caprice. Thus in *The Sacred Disease*,¹⁵ where the magicians and purifiers attribute mental derangement to attacks by Hecate and the heroes, there is no indication that this is done as a punishment. Similarly, the basic meaning of one of the popular Greek words for madness — *kakodaimonian* — is to be under the influence of an evil *daimon*, or spirit. I say 'under the influence

of', because I do not believe that the concept of insanity as caused by actual demonic possession, such as is seen in the famous incident of the Gadarene swine,¹⁶ is Greek. The Greek word for 'superstitious' is *deisidaimon*, that is, somebody who fears *daimones*, and one of the characteristic actions of the Superstitious Man in the *Characters* of Theophrastus is that of spitting whenever he sees a madman or epileptic, presumably because such people are affected by a *daimon*. The apotropaic gesture of spitting at the sight of a madman is amply attested in Greek and Roman writers, and there is also evidence that it was not uncommon for madmen to be stoned — again, perhaps an apotropaic act.

Among the Romans, the equivalent of the Greek *daimones* seems to have been the *Larvae*, a word perhaps cognate with the *Lares*, the protecting spirits of the house, and like them, of Etruscan origin. But unlike the *Lares*, the *Larvae* were evil spirits, who are frequently cited in the comedies of Plautus as driving people mad: 'He's babbling away; the *Larvae* are goading him on.' The adjectival form, *larvatus*, is defined by the Oxford Latin Dictionary as meaning 'Possessed by evil spirits, demented'. However, the jurist Paulus is cited as defining *larvati* as being *furiosi et mente moti, quasi larvis exterriti*, 'raving and mentally disturbed, as though terrified by larvae'. My own conclusion is that there is no conclusive evidence that the Greeks and Romans believed in demonic possession, since even the apotropaic gestures of spitting and stoning can be interpreted as driving away the evil spirit that is *tormenting*, rather than *inhabiting*, the mad person.¹⁷

Finally in our survey of popular attitudes towards mental illness, a brief word on the moon as a cause of insanity. There is no doubt that popular belief in antiquity regarded the moon as exerting a baleful influence on people's minds and mental stability. Thus the ancient commentator on Sophocles' *Ajax* can say that 'people suppose that the majority of madmen get their illness from the moon, because the moon is mistress of the apparitions of the night'. However, it appears that the Latin *lunaticus*, the origin of our 'lunatic', and its Greek equivalent *selenikos*, are both late and rare words and both mean 'epileptic' rather than 'lunatic'.¹⁸

Having examined some aspects of popular attitudes towards mental illness, I would now like to turn to the Greek and Roman medical writers.

Mental Illness in the Medical Writers

Ancient medical writing spans a period of more than a thousand years, from the Hippocratic

Corpus of the fifth and fourth centuries BC through to writers of late classical antiquity such as Caelius Aurelianus in the fifth century AD and includes such famous names as Celsus and Galen. Not surprisingly, over such a long period there were changes in attitudes towards the nature of disease and methods of treatment, especially with the growth of rival schools of medical theorists and practitioners, such as the Empiricists, the Methodists, the Dogmatists and the Pneumatists or Eclectics. Nevertheless, all the writers deal with mental illness and with all of them there are basic common threads that permit of some generalisations on the ways that they perceived and treated it.

First, there is general agreement among all the writers from Hippocrates onwards that the brain, not the heart or any other organ, is the seat of psychic activity and that this is where the disturbances that cause mental illness occur; though this is not the same as saying that mental illness is a disease of the brain, but of the psyche located in the brain. The earliest and most vigorous statement of this proposition is that which is found in the Hippocratic essay *On the Sacred Disease* (XVII ff): 'Men ought to know that our pleasures, joys, laughter and jests arise from the brain alone, as do also pains, sorrows, sadnesses and tears. And it is by means of the brain, in particular, that we think, see, hear and distinguish the ugly and the beautiful, the good and the bad and the pleasant and the unpleasant.'

The second important point — and one that has a very modern sound about it — is that the ancient medical writers regarded *all* diseases, including mental, as being essentially organic. In I. E. Drabkin's words,¹⁹ 'there can be no merely functional disorder without organic basis' and 'mental disease [i.e., to the ancient medical writers] is a *physiologic* disturbance in the locus of psychic activity'; and the locus of disturbance, as we have seen, is the brain. There can thus be no treating of the *psyche* separate from the *soma*. I note, however, that this attitude of the medical writers was not necessarily that of all practising doctors, if we may believe the statement of Plato (*Charmides* 157 B) that 'the great error of our day in the treatment of human beings is that some physicians separate treatment of soul from treatment of the body'. Nevertheless, the important fact is that the ancient medical writers conceived of illness in purely rational, physiological terms. Modern scholars, as I early remarked, have conjectured that some of the commonly used drugs and treatments in ancient medicine may ultimately go back to primitive

religions and magical rituals, but this does not alter the fact that the Greek and Roman doctors regarded all forms of illness in a rational and scientific manner, in which the supernatural played no part.

The physiological theory that underlies this organic view of mental illness, and, indeed, all illness, is the famous *humoral theory*. This theory regards the body as consisting of or containing four basis 'humours': blood, which is hot; phlegm, which is cold; yellow bile, which is dry; and black bile, which is moist. These determine the health of the body, depending on which humour predominates. The theory may well have had its origin in the early philosophical theories of the four basic elements of the world — earth, air, fire and water — and their respective qualities — cold, dry, hot and moist. This is not the place to discuss the complexities of the humoral theory. Suffice it to say that all disease is the result of an imbalance in the blending of the humours (*krasis*), which affects a particular organ of the body. As the author of the Hippocratic *Nature of Man* says: 'The body of the human has in it blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile, and these are its nature . . . it is healthy, therefore, when these are in a state of moderation with respect to their blending, power and number.' Our word 'temperament' is, in fact, the Latin word *temperamentum*, which itself is the Latin translation of the Greek *krasis*, a 'blending' of the humours. Though in the Hippocratic Corpus the terms phlegmatic, choleric, melancholic and sanguine are always linked to the doctrine of physical humours, in later Greek and Roman writers they came to be used to describe a *psychological* type, with a natural predisposition to the mental illness associated with the humour predominating in each type.²⁰ The balance of the humoral mix could be affected by external as well as internal factors: the food you ate; whether you exercised or not; visual and auditory stimuli; the weather and the climate.

Another important physiological factor in the cause of illness is the so-called *pneuma*, air or breath, which was believed to be the vital force that gave intelligence to the brain, which in turn transmitted its commands to the rest of the body in the *pneuma*, which was carried by the blood. Mental illness is caused either by the brain's being affected by one of the humours or by the blocking off from the brain of the vital *pneuma* by an excess of a humour, especially the cold phlegm. Excessive heating of the blood carrying the *pneuma* to the brain can also cause madness. The *pneuma* which, when breathed in, went first to the brain, where it left its purest and intelligence-

bearing nature, became known as *psychic pneuma* or 'soul-breath'. The importance of the *pneuma* in mental activity can be seen as early as the Hippocratic *On the Sacred Disease*. But perhaps the most developed theory of the interaction and interrelationship of the humours and the *pneuma* in the causing of mental illness is to be found in the works of Galen. He believed that the psyche was located in the brain and that the psyche transmitted its commands to limbs and organs by means of the psychic *pneuma*, which was found in the ventricles of the brain. Mental illness arose when the substance of the brain was deteriorated by a humour, with deleterious consequences both to the psyche and its *pneuma*.²¹

Did the ancients recognise different types of mental illness? The answer is a very definite 'yes', though it is not always possible to apply modern categories in the ancient descriptions; nor did the ancients distinguish between psychoses and neuroses. I. E. Drabkin gives the clearest statement of the major ancient categories of mental illness, and I shall follow him closely here. First, a distinction was made between idiopathic mental disease and symptomatic mental aberration attendant upon other diseases, and second, acute and chronic mental illnesses were clearly distinguished. The acute illnesses were normally attended by fever; the chronic usually were without fever. The main acute illness was called *phrenitis* or *phrenesis*, from which comes our English words 'frenzy' and 'frenetic'. The Greek term should mean an illness of the *phren*, which is the diaphragm, originally believed to be the seat of the intelligence. The Roman writer Aurelianus says 'we recognise phrenitis . . . from the combination of acute fever, mental derangement, small and rapid pulse and the plucking of straws and hairs'.²² Some modern scholars have considered phrenitis to be the delirium attendant upon malaria. Others have regarded it as meningitis, encephalitis and typhus. The main *chronic* illnesses were *mania*, characterised by excitement, and *melancholia*, characterised by depression. Disagreement existed among the medical writers as to whether melancholia was a form of mania or not, but the more prevalent view was that they were two distinct illnesses. Aurelianus states that mania can be either continuous or intermittent and gives some examples of how it manifests itself: 'now in anger, now in merriment, now in sadness and futility and now . . . in an overpowering fear of things which are quite harmless (e.g. caves or falling in a ditch)'.²³ Some patients think they are animals, others a god, another a stalk of grain,

another cried like a baby and begged to be carried in the arms. The great philologist Artemidorus was afflicted with mania by the sudden approach of a crocodile when he was lying on the sand; he imagined that his left leg and hand had been eaten by the animal, and he lost his memory even of literature. A woman believed that the universe was held up by her middle finger and that it would collapse if she bent the finger. Melancholia is stated to be more frequent among men, especially in middle age; it manifests itself by mental anguish and distress, dejection, silence, animosity towards members of the household, sometimes a desire to live and at other times a longing for death, suspicion by the patient that a plot is being hatched against him, weeping without reason, meaningless muttering and, again, occasional joviality.²⁴

I shall only briefly mention here *epilepsy* and *hysteria*, the disease of the 'floating womb', because I am not convinced that the ancients regarded epilepsy as a *psychic* illness in the same way as mania or melancholia. It was, however, believed by the medical writers that melancholics could become epileptics. Similarly *hysteria* is said by Drabkin, to whose opinion I defer, not to have been regarded in antiquity as primarily a mental disorder, though it is possible that neurotic states in women were often treated under this heading. Celsus gives us the following treatment for a woman suffering from hysterical fits caused by 'disease of the genitals': 'burn snails with their shells and pound them up together; then add honey to them'. Presumably, the sticky paste is then applied to the affected area.²⁵ As a curiosity, it may also be mentioned that Soranus and others viewed homosexuality, both male and female, as a form of mental disease, for which no bodily treatment exists. Soranus is here speaking of the 'female' partner in male homosexuality and the 'male' in lesbianism.²⁶

As to the treatment of the mentally ill patient, a quite sophisticated methodology gradually evolved, which was varied according to the type of disease and the type of patient, and which combined a mixture of both somatic and psychotherapeutic treatment. Modern writers have pointed out how the medical writers emphasise the importance of gentleness and kindness in the handling of the patients and the importance of good nursing. Among the somatic measures commonly found are massage and rubbing the head with oil; exercise; a balanced diet; hot and cold baths; travel, where possible, especially by sea; blood-letting and purges; and the use of soporific drugs to induce sleep. The

letting of blood and administering of purges was done in order to get rid of the offending humour, with the most common purgative being black hellebore. I have already mentioned the possibility that the use of hellebore may well have its origin in old magical rituals of catharsis. Certainly the use of hellebore in the treatment of insanity was as widely known outside medical circles as is today the use of Valium with anxious and neurotic patients. The Greek phrase 'give yourself a dose of hellebore' is perhaps the exact parallel of the modern 'you need to see a head-shrinker'.²⁷

Among the psychotherapeutic aspects of treatment, the ancient writers emphasise how important it is that the patient's room should not contain objects such as pictures, or brightly coloured walls and carpets, which might excite the patient and cause him to experience hallucinations. Disputes existed among doctors as to whether the room should be kept light or dark. Visiting should be strictly controlled and limited to people whom the patient holds in awe or veneration. The nurses should talk to the patient and try to dispel his fantasies by reasoned argument. If, however, the patient becomes excited at being contradicted, the nurses should agree with and humour his fantastic notions. If a patient is fond of literature, they should read to him and the reader should make deliberate mistakes in order to keep the patient's mind occupied and alert. Celsus tells of the wealthy man who was obsessed with the fear of dying of starvation: to ease his anxiety, people would come in from time to time and announce to him pretended legacies.²⁸ Nevertheless, despite the general concern for gentleness, the writers do recommend that sterner measures should be taken with violent patients and with certain other types of mentally ill. The patient who is in danger of injuring himself should be tied to his bed, though with woollen padding to prevent the ropes from chafing. Celsus says that flogging and threats may be applied to the violent, and even the merely deluded may be given a form of shock therapy consisting of starvation, fetters and flogging.²⁹ Aurelianus rejects the use of flogging to restore the reason on the ground that, logically, the affected part, the head, should be flogged, not the body, if this form of treatment really were valid.³⁰ Finally, as mentioned earlier, there was a widespread belief among the medical writers in the therapeutic value of music, especially flute music, provided that the appropriate musical mode was chosen for the particular illness. Thus the soft Phrygian mode was useful to those suffering from depression; the graver Dorian mode was

appropriate to those suffering from laughing and childish hilarity. A contrary view, however, maintained that music could actually induce madness and was, therefore, a dangerous form of therapy.

One further question that arises from the treatment of mental patients is 'where were they treated?' The answer seems to be that in both Greece and Rome there were no mental hospitals or institutions and that the family or close friends were expected to look after any insane member at home. This in itself would lend support to the argument mentioned earlier that the medical treatment described in the medical writers is 'rich person's medicine'. The carefully prepared sick room and numerous nurses could only be found in the house of a wealthy person.

Legal Aspects of Mental Illness

The fact that the insane were looked after at home by their family or friends naturally leads to a consideration of aspects of the legal position of the family of the insane person as well as that of the person himself. Obvious questions that arise are those of defining legal responsibilities and of determining the criteria whereby a person is declared insane. One legal responsibility assumed by the family was the guardianship of the person's property. At Rome the control of the property was given to a *curator*, appointed by a magistrate. The *curator* was normally one of the agnate relatives, but, until a fairly late date, could not be the son of the insane father, nor could the husband become the *curator* of his insane wife. These restrictions go along with the stringent rules defining the powers of the *curator* in handling the insane person's property. The law, both in Greece and in Rome, was very concerned that the insane person should not squander the family's property and equally that the insane person should not be defrauded by unscrupulous relatives. For a modern parallel, I draw your attention to the detailed provisions for the functions of the Public Curator in the Queensland Mental Health Act.

Next, how was a person deemed to be insane and incapable of managing his affairs? At Rome, the decision was usually made by the *praetor*, an elected official with judicial responsibilities. In democratic Athens, we know that the decision was made by a popular court on the basis of a formal 'indictment for insanity' (*graphe paranoias*). But we have no indication as to the criteria used by either the Roman magistrate or the Athenian courts in making this decision. But then the 1974 Queensland Act, which empowers the Supreme Court to declare a person insane, does not spell

out the criteria. There is a famous story that the son of the tragedian Sophocles took his aged father to court to have him declared insane. Sophocles read out a long passage from his recently completed tragedy *Oedipus the King* and the court dismissed the case, saying that no insane person could have written such poetry.³¹ Modern scholars have tended to dismiss this story as a later fabrication, but there is no need to doubt the reality of the legal procedure involved. There is, however, no record of a doctor appearing before the relevant body to certify insanity. It is likely, of course, that the majority of cases to be brought before a magistrate or a court would be those concerning the father of the family and, at Rome, the wife who had property rights of her own.

With respect to the legal status of a person formally declared insane, the evidence is slight, but in both Athens and Rome it appears that he could not manage or dispose of property, even by testamentary disposition, nor could he exercise his civil rights until declared sane again. Equally, at Rome, the lunatic was freed of his civil obligations, such as holding municipal office, which was both unpaid and a heavy burden on the holder. The jurist Ulpian tells us that it was not uncommon for rich people to feign madness in order to evade their civil obligations, and that the *praetor* must appoint a *curator* only after the most thorough investigation of the case.³²

In both Athens and Rome, the family or friends of the lunatic became legally responsible for his behaviour. This, at any rate, is the conclusion to be drawn for Athens from Plato's legislation for his imaginary Cretan city in the *Laws*, since much of the legislation put forward by Plato in this work reflects current Athenian practice. From the *Laws* we learn that the insane person who commits an act resulting in damage is not to be punished for the act, but must pay for the damage; and that the insane person must not be seen openly in the city, but the relations of such a person must watch over him in the best manner they know of, and, if they are negligent, they must pay a fine, the size of which is in proportion to their personal property-rating.³³ Roman practice, at least for the second century AD onwards, is clearly seen in a Rescript of the emperors Marcus Aurelius and Commodus, cited by the jurist Aemilius Macer, concerning a man who had been declared insane and had killed his mother.³⁴ The emperors declare that if it is certain that he was insane when he committed the deed, he is not to be punished, 'since he has already been sufficiently punished by his insanity'. If, however, his insanity at the time is proved and since he remains in the charge of his friends, or

under guard in his own house, the relevant official must investigate the negligence that enabled the deed to be done, 'for keepers are appointed for insane persons, not only to prevent them from injuring themselves, but that they may not be a source of destruction to others; and where this takes place, those very properly should be held responsible who are guilty in the discharge of their duties'. We may note how closely this Roman practice mirrors that prescribed by Plato in the *Laws*.

Plato, indeed, says much of interest to the student of the psyche, especially in the *Republic*, and I regret that time will allow me to do no more than mention some of these aspects. Plato, for example, divided the human psyche into three parts: the rational and ruling; the passionate and emotional; and the appetitive and desiring part. A psyche is healthy when all three parts are in harmony and performing their appropriate functions, but sick when one of the lower parts, especially the appetitive, assumes control and discord reigns. The similarities to, and differences from, Freud's *ego*, *superego* and *id* have often been pointed out by modern scholars. The Plato-Freud comparison has recently been taken further by Dr B. Simon, who argues in a fascinating book³⁵ that many of the basic attitudes and ideas of both the philosopher and the psychoanalyst may be traced back to a Primal Scene Trauma or Fantasy. Again, Plato's conclusion in the *Republic*, that mental health and sickness are essentially identical with moral virtue and vice, has implications, according to Anthony Kenny,³⁶ similar to those arising from the introduction into English law (in the Mental Health Act of 1959) of the concept of the psychopath, the diagnosis of which demands what is in effect a moral judgement as to the limits of normal aggressiveness and the boundary between frivolity and serious irresponsibility. Finally, Plato might well be regarded as foreshadowing the use made of psychiatric institutions in certain countries as a way of eliminating dissent from the social system. For in the *Laws* an atheist who is regarded as not being beyond re-education is to be shut away in an institution called the *Sophronisterion*, or House of Chastening, for five years, where, deprived of contact with all other citizens, he is to be subjected to regular 'conversations' with the members of the Nocturnal Council 'to ensure the health of his soul'. But Plato was at least willing to give the atheist the opportunity of seeing the error of his ways. In his own city, democratic Athens, the champion of liberty and free speech, atheism was

a crime punishable by death, and it was on this charge that Plato's teacher, the great Socrates, had been unjustly condemned and executed.

I shall close this paper on a lighter note by telling a story told about himself by Galen. It is one that shows that, just as there existed in classical antiquity rival theories about how to treat mentally ill patients, so too there existed a professional rivalry and jealousy among the leading and fashionable doctors not unknown today. Galen relates how, when he first came to Rome in AD 162, there was a distinguished and wealthy man called Lucius Martius, who was seized with the illness of melancholia every year. 'It was amazing,' says Galen, 'to see the folly, the ignorance and the brutality of those doctors whom everyone at that time regarded as the foremost. For some of them emptied Lucius of his phlegmatic humour and others of his yellow bile. But Lucius was making no progress and so, when he heard about me, he immediately called me in and asked me to discuss the origin and treatment of his complaint. I went to his bedside and using only the evidence of his colour, I recognised the melancholic humour as the one vexing him and drew it off; and straightaway he was cured of his melancholia.'³⁷ If only all mental illnesses could be diagnosed and cured with such a swift, unerring touch. At any rate, I can assert that in my brief acquaintance with the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists I have seen much evidence of diversity of opinion, but none of the rivalry and jealousies of Galen's Rome.

References

1. See, for example, the pseudo-Aristotelian *Problems*, XXX, 'Problems concerned with Thought, Intelligence and Wisdom'. O. Temkin, however, in his book *The Sacred Disease*, Johns Hopkins, Baltimore, 2nd edn, 1971, strongly argues against the proposition that Euripides was trying to depict Heracles as an epileptic.
2. 'The Psychotherapy Scene in Euripides' *Bacchae*', *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, XC, 1970, pp. 35-48.
3. Herodotus, *The Histories*, VI.75 ff, translated by A. de Selincourt, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1968.
4. For another example of divinely inspired madness in Herodotus, see his account of the Persian king Cambyses in Book III. Cambyses' madness was said by the Egyptians to be a punishment for his sacrilegious slaying of the sacred Apis-calf. Herodotus is sceptical here, preferring to regard Cambyses' insanity as having developed from his life-long epilepsy.
5. Aristophanes, *Wasps*, 85 ff.
6. Hippocrates, *The Sacred Disease*, chs II and IV.
7. The question of religious pollution is the subject of R. Parker's book, *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion*, Clarendon, Oxford, 1983; see especially pp. 208 ff for his discussion of *katharmos*. Washing the hands is one of the compulsive acts of neurotics, and may involve a symbolism like that of ritual purification.
8. Strangely, the 43 epigraphically attested cures from the temple of Asclepius at Epidaurus do not contain a single example of a cure for insanity. For Asclepius, see E. J. & L. Edelstein, *Asclepius: a Collection and Interpretation of the Testimonies*, Johns Hopkins, Baltimore, 1945.
9. For the therapeutic nature of Corybantism, see E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1951, pp. 78 ff.
10. Plato, *Laws* 790 e.
11. Op. cit. p. 213.
12. Theophrastus, *History of Plants*, 9.10.
13. Op. cit. pp. 79 ff.
14. Aristophanes, Fragment 58, in C. Austin, *Comicorum Graecorum Fragmenta in Papyris Reperta*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, 1973.
15. Hippocrates, *The Sacred Disease*, ch. IV.

16. Matthew, 28.
17. The German word *Larve*, 'grub', also retains its Latin derivative meaning of 'spectre' or 'ghoul'.
18. Cf., Paulus, *Digest* 21.1.43, where the opposition of *lunaticus* to *furiosus*, the regular word for insane, shows that it cannot mean 'insane'.
19. 'Remarks on Ancient Psychopathology', *Isis*, 46, 1955, pp. 223-34.
20. See, for example, Pseudo-Aristotle, *Problems*, XXX (cited in footnote 1) for the 'melancholic man'.
21. The concept of the 'psychic pneuma' was still current as late as the seventeenth century AD. The English physician Thomas Willis wrote in 1682 that epilepsy was caused by the explosion of 'spiritus animalis' in the middle of the brain. *Spiritus animalis* is an exact Latin translation of the Greek *psychicon pneuma*, and the psyche was located, in Greek thought, in the centre of the brain. I owe this reference to Thomas Willis to Professor M. J. Eadie.
22. Caelius Aurelianus, *Acute Diseases*, I.35.
23. *idem*, *Chronic Diseases* I.144 ff.
24. *Ibid.*, 180 ff.
25. Celsus, *De Medicina*, V.21.
26. Cited by Aurelianus, *Chronic Diseases*, IV.131 ff.
27. See Celsus, *op. cit.* III.18 and Aurelianus, *Acute Diseases* I. 58 ff and *Chronic Diseases* I.155 ff, for all these and the following methods of treatment.
28. *Op. cit.*, III.18.10.
29. *Ibid.*, sections 4, 10, 21.
30. *Chronic Diseases* I.175.
31. The story is told by Cicero, *De Senectute* (*On Old Age*), ch. 22, and Plutarch, *Moralia* 785a.
32. Plato, *Laws* 929 d-e; Demosthenes, XLVI.14; *Digest*, XXVII.10.6.
33. Plato, *Laws* 864 d-e, 934 c-d.
34. *Digest*, I.18.14, from Macer's *De Iudiciis Publicis* (*On Criminal Trials*), translated by S. P. Scott, in *The Civil Law*, vol. I, pp. 259-60, AMS Press, New York, 1973. I am indebted for this reference to my colleague, Dr S. Dixon.
35. B. Simon, *Mind and Madness in Ancient Greece: the Classical Roots of Modern Psychiatry*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 1978, pp. 209 ff.
36. 'Mental Health in Plato's Republic', in A. Kenny, *The Anatomy of the Soul: Historical Essays in the Philosophy of the Mind*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1973, pp. 1-27.
37. Galen, vol. XVI (Kuhn), p. 456.

R. D. MILNS, BA, MA
 Department of Classics and Ancient History,
 University of Queensland,
 St Lucia, Qld 4067